DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 314 806 CS 507 035

AUTHOR Samter, Wendy; Burleson, Brant R.
TITLE Evaluations of Communication Skills as Predictors of Peer Acceptance in a Group Living Situation.
PUB DATE Nov 89
NOTE 38p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (75th, San Francisco, CA, November 18-21, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Affective Behavior; Attitude Measures; Communication Research; *Communication Skills; Correlation; Group Experience; Higher Education; *Interpersonal Communication; Participant Characteristics; *Peer Acceptance; Sex Differences; Social Values; *Young Adults
IDENTIFIERS *Communication Behavior

ABSTRACT

A study examined communication skills of college students to determine the relationship between individuals' skill valuings and their acceptance within peer groups of intact social systems. Data were gathered from 102 residents of two fraternities and 106 residents of two sororities. Subjects completed the Communication Functions Questionnaire and several other questionnaires during large group sessions and were also individually interviewed to provide several different sociometric assessments of peer acceptance and to tap the perceived importance of eight different communication skills in friends. Results revealed that college students highly valuing the affectively oriented communication skills of friends enjoyed significantly higher levels of peer acceptance than those placing a premium on non-affectively oriented skills. Concerning gender differences, results were consistent with the findings of previous research documenting gender-related differences in friendship conceptions and behaviors. (Four tables of data are included; 23 references are attached.) (KEH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED314806

Evaluations of Communication Skills as Predictors of Peer Acceptance in a Group Living Situation

Wendy Samter
University of Delaware

Brant R. Burleson
Purdue University

Running Head: Skills as Predictors

Presented at the annual convention of the Speech Communication Association, November 18-21, 1989, San Francisco, CA.

Wendy Samter (Ph.D., Purdue University, 1989) is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716. Brant R. Burleson (Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1982) is an associate professor in the Department of Communication, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907.

CS507035

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Brant R. Burleson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Evaluations of Communication Skills as Predictors of Peer Acceptance in a Group Living Situation

Abstract

This paper develops the hypothesis that holding age- and gender-typical conceptions of the friendship relation -- conceptions expressed in evaluations of several communication skills -- is an important determinant of interpersonal acceptance by peers. Young adults view friendship as a context for the discussion of selves, feelings, and relationships, and therefore place high value on communication skills such as ego support and comforting. Thus, we hypothesized that college students highly valuing the affectively oriented communication skills of friends would enjoy higher levels of peer acceptance than those placing a premium on non-affectively oriented skills. However, we also anticipated that gender would mediate the relationship between valuing affectively oriented skills and interpersonal acceptance. Participants (residents of two fraternities and two sororities) responded to a questionnaire tapping the perceived importance of eight different communication skills in friends and completed interviews providing several different sociometric assessments of peer acceptance. Correlational analyses detected weak, but significant associations between valuing affectively oriented communication skills and indices of interpersonal acceptance; some of these relationships varied in the expected manner as a function of gender.

Evaluations of Communication Skills as Predictors of Peer Acceptance in a Group Living Situation

In several recent papers, we have described the development of an instrument designed to identify the specific communication skills young adults value in same-sex friends (Burleson & Samter, in press; Burleson, Werking, Samter, & Holloway, 1988; Werking, Samter, & Burleson, 1989). This instrument, the Communication Functions Questionnaire (CFQ), elicits evaluations about a range of communication skills. To date, our research with the CFQ has been directed at determining: (a) which of several specific communication skills young adults value in their friends; (b) the extent to which a consensus exists among ordinary people about which communication skills are more and less important in friends; (c) whether valuings of certain communication skills correspond to age-typical conceptions of the friendship relation; and (d) whether judgments about the importance of certain skills vary systematically as a function of variables such as gender and interpersonal cognitive complexity.

The present paper extends this research program by examining the relationship between individuals' skill valuings and their acceptance within the peer group. Specifically, this papers reports a study assessing the relationship between the communication skills college students report valuing in their friends and the extent to

which these students are accepted or rejected by fellow students with whom they happen to be living.

The information contained in a person's evaluations of different communication skills can be used in several different ways to predict that individual's level of interpersonal acceptance. For example, one approach involves identifying the skills receiving consensually high endorsement by the peer group; persons with advanced levels of these highly valued skills would be expected to be more successful with peers while those with poor levels of these specific skills may be less liked and less accepted. This approach was taken by Samter (1989) in dissertation research. She reported some limited support for the hypothesis that people with high levels of valued skills are more accepted by peers.

A less obvious -- though equally interesting -- approach for using the information contained in persons' evaluations of different communication skills involves viewing these evaluations as expressions of fundamental conceptualizations of the friendship relation. Considerable research shows that basic conceptions of and expectations for the friendship relation change systematically over the course of development (see the reviews by Serafica, 1982; Tesch, 1983). As ideas about the friendship relation change, so might judgments about the communication skills it is desirable for friends to have. Hence, it might be expected that persons whose communication skill valuings

reflect age- and gender-typical conceptions of the friendship relation would be more accepted by peers than individuals with idiosyncratic conceptions of the skills that are important in friends. This analysis of the significance of communication skill evaluations is developed in the present study.

As suggested above, conceptions of and expectations for the friendship relation change systematically over the course of development (e.g., Berndt, 1986; Damon, 1977). Young children conceive of friends as those with whom they interact frequently, exchange pleasantries, share objects, and engage in common activities. Children describe friends in terms of physical characteristics, possessions, and shared activities. With development, people acquire a more "psychologically centered" view of the friendship relation. Thus, adults view friends as those with whom they exchange intimacies, share important parts of themselves, reciprocally provide emotional support, and explore feelings. Adults describe and evaluate friends in terms of psychological closeness, trust, loyalty, and commitment (e.g., Tesch & Martin, 1983).

Consistent with the way adults typically conceive of the friendship relation, research with the CFQ has found that college students rate affectively oriented communication skills as more important for friends to possess than non-affectively oriented skills (Burleson & Samter, in press; Burleson et al., 1988). That is, college

students most highly value their friends' ego-support skills, comforting skills, and conflict management skills.

Besides systematic developmental differences in friendship conceptions, there are also important gender differences in how the friendship relation is conceptualized (for a review, see Winstead, 1986). Females view activities related to talk -- especially talk about selves, feelings, and relationships -- as particularly central in same-sex friendships. In contrast, males view friendship as more activity centered: Friends are those with whom one does things. Further, even though males may talk as much to their same-sex friends as do females, the topics discussed by the two genders differ. While female friends frequently focus their talk on feelings and relationships, male friends -- consistent with their activity-centered view of friendship -- spend a greater proportion of time discussing shared activities, sports, careers, and other non-feeling-centered topics (see Aries & Johnson, 1983).

Correspondent with these gender differences in friendship conceptions and expectations, research using the CFQ has found significant differences in the communication skills male and female college students value in their friends (Werking et al., 1989). Specifically, females rated the ego-support and comforting skills of their friends as more important than did males. Ego support and comforting are clearly relevant to the feeling and relationship focus of many female friendships. In contrast, males rated the

narrative and persuasive skills of their same-sex friends as more important than did females. Placing a high value on these latter skills appears consistent with the activity-centered conception of friendship held by many males.[1]

Evaluations of the importance of different communication skills thus reflect age- and gender-typical conceptions of the friendship relation. This is as it should be given the central role communication plays in the development and maintenance of friendships. Further, it suggests that evaluations of the importance of friends' communication skills can be used to assess persons' underlying conceptions of the friendship relation. That is, reports about the communication skills people value in friends can be viewed as embodying more general conceptions of and expectations for the friendship relation. Thus, analyses of how friendship conceptions influence features of relationships can proceed through assessments of communication skill evaluations. This may be especially appropriate in research taking a communication perspective.

Holding age- and gender-typical conceptions of the friendship relation may be an important predictor of interpersonal acceptance by the peer group. That is, several researchers (e.g., Selman, 1981; Smollar & Youniss, 1982) have suggested that individuals adhering to age- and gender-typical conceptions of friendship should interact in more appropriate ways with peers and, hence, should be more desirable relational partners. To mesh effectively in an

intimate relationship, it is important that persons share common views on the basic character of the relationship, common expectations for the other's conduct, and common beliefs about appropriate activities.

Individuals with divergent conceptions of the friendship relation may not get along. Further, persons holding ideas about the friendship relation that depart substantially from age- and gender-appropriate norms may find it difficult to develop deep and enduring relationships with peers. For example, persons with less developmentally advanced conceptions of friendship than peers may be viewed as "childish," "immature," or even "untrustworthy." Similarly, failure to hold a gender-typical conception of the friendship relation may negatively affect same-sex peer relations. Females with an overly "male" view of friendship may be viewed as "cold" or "distant" by other women. Males with an overly "female" view of friendship might be viewed as "overly sensitive" or even "gay" by same-sex peers (homophobia is present among many college males).

Although it appears reasonable to assume that persons holding age- and gender-typical conceptions of the friendship relation enjoy higher levels of acceptance by peers than those with more idiosyncratic conceptions, no data supporting this notion have been reported. Thus, we carried out the current study to assess whether persons with age- and gender-typical conceptions of friendship -- as

expressed in their evaluations of different communication skills -- are more accepted by peers.

Specifically, we hypothesized that since college students typically (a) conceive of friendship as a relation involving the exchange of intimacies, the discussion of feelings, and the provision of interpersonal support, and (b) rate communication skills such as ego support and comforting as the most important skills for friends to possess, that students' levels of interpersonal acceptance would be positively correlated with their evaluations of affectively oriented communication skills. In contrast, we expected that college students with atypical conceptions of friendship, expressed in low evaluations of affectively oriented skills, would be less accepted by peers.

However, we further expected the relationship between evaluations of communication skills and peer acceptance to be mediated by gender. Since females are more inclined than males to view friendship as a context for the discussion of intimate thoughts, feelings, and desires, women placing a high premium on affectively oriented communication skills should be better liked by their same-gender peers than should males by their same gender peers. In contrast, since males take a more "activity-centered" view of friendship than females, males placing high value on activity-centered skills such as narrative and persuasive abilities should be more accepted by same-gender peers than females placing high value on these skills.

Method

Participants and General Procedures

Participants in the study were residents of two fraternities (N = 102) and two sororities (N = 106). Since the design of the study required that subjects be drawn from intact social systems, only members living in the chapter houses were recruited for participation in the study. At least 80% of the members residing in each of the houses participated in the study; this high level of participation was needed to obtain reliable assessments of peer acceptance.

Data were collected during two sessions. Participants completed the CFQ and several other questionnaires during a large group session held in each house immediately after a chapter meeting. Each participant was individually interviewed during a second session to obtain assessments of their liking for other house members; several other tasks were completed during this interview (for full details regarding subject recruitment and procedures, see Samter, 1989).

Evaluations of Communication Skills

Participants' judgments about the importance of different communication skills in friends were obtained by having them complete a version of the Communication Functions Questionnaire (CFQ). This questionnaire was developed to measure the perceived importance of eight different communication skills in the friend relationship.

The eight skills included comforting (the ability to make others feel better when depressed, sad, or upset), ego support (the ability to make another feel good about him or herself), conflict management (the ability to reach mutually satisfying solutions in conflicts), persuasion (the ability to get people to modify their thoughts and behaviors), referential or informative skill (the ability to convey information clearly and unambiguously), regulative skill (the ability to help someone who has violated a norm fix the mistake effectively), narrative skill (the ability to entertain through jokes, gossip, stories, etc.), and conversational skill (the ability to initiate, maintain, and terminate enjoyable casual conversations). The full version of the CFQ is composed of two separate tasks, a skill rating task and a skill ranking task; however, here we report results only for the rating task.

Ratings for the importance of the skills were obtained by having participants respond to five, seven-point Likert items for each of the eight skills; thus 40 randomly ordered items were included in the CFQ. The items were written to reflect outcomes typically achieved through the effective exercise of the communication skills. For example, items tapping ego support included "Makes me feel like a good person," and "Makes me believe in myself," while items tapping referential skill included "Explains things like directions or instructions so they're really easy to follow," and "Makes you understand exactly what he/she is

referring to." Participants were instructed to rate how important it was for same-sex peers to have the skills expressed by each item.

Insert Table 1 About Here

A maximum likelihood extraction method was employed in factor analyzing the CFQ. This procedure calls for the a priori specification of items comprising various factors. It is appropriate when, as in this case, theory suggests particular items should represent distinct phenomena (see Tabachnick & Fidell, 1983). In factor analyses using a maximum likelihood extraction, items are retained on factors if loadings are reasonably high and if the Chi-square statistic for the factor is nonsignificant. These criteria led to the retention of 33 of the original 40 items. A list of the 33 items and their associated alpha coefficients are presented in table 1. Scores were created by adding ratings for the items retained to assess each skill and dividing this total by n (where n is the number of items retained).

To further explore the structure of the CFQ data, a secondary factor analysis was conducted on the intercorrelations among the mean ratings for the eight communication skills. A principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation was employed. Table 2 presents the two factor solution that emerged. All four affectively oriented communication skills (i.e., comforting, conflict management,

regulation, and ego support) loaded highly on the first factor. This factor (called the "affectively oriented" factor) had an eigenvalue of 3.64 and explained approximately 45.5% of the variance in perceived importance ratings. Two non-affectively oriented communication skills, persuasion and narrative ability, loaded highly on the second factor. This factor (called the "non-affectively oriented" factor) had an eigenvalue of 1.30 and explained approximately 16.3% of the variance in the CFQ ratings. Referential and conversational skill loaded moderately on both factors; thus, they were dropped from this analysis.

****

Insert Table 2 About Here

****

Peer Acceptance

Peer acceptance is a multidimensional construct composed of components such as popularity, rejection, and liking as well as more specific roles relevant to particular social systems (e.g., "peer counselor" and "partier" in the culture of fraternities and sororities). Thus, multiple indices of interpersonal acceptance were obtained in the present study.

Two different sociometric tasks were employed to assess interpersonal acceptance. One task asked subjects to nominate peers who filled various social roles, including "most liked peer," "least liked peer," "most supportive peer," and "person most fun to party with." A second

assessment asked participants to rate how much they liked each of their fellow fraternity or sorority members.[2]

Peer nominations. Each participant was asked to name three people in the house he/she "most liked" and three people he/she "least liked." (Although it was feared that subjects might have some difficulty disclosing the names of the housemates they disliked, after several interviews it became clear that participants were not only unconcerned about disclosing the names of people they didn't like, but were eager to discuss with the experimenter the personalities, traits, lineage, and annoying habits of these people.)

Each participant was also asked to name three house members he/she felt were "the most supportive" (called "counselor" nominations) and three members he/she believed were "the most fun to party with" (called "partier" nominations). Individuals were permitted to nominate group members for these latter roles whom they had previously mentioned for the "liked" or "disliked" nominations.

Numbers of nominations received for each social role were employed in subsequent data analyses as measures of acceptance. In addition, procedures developed by Coie, Dodge, and Coppotelli (1982) were used to define indices of "social preference" and "social impact." According to these procedures, the number of "most liked" nominations received by a subject was summed to form a Total Positive Nominations (TPN) score, while the number of "least liked" nominations

was summed to yield a Total Negative Nominations (TNN) score. For each fraternity and sorority, participants' TPN and TNN scores were transformed to Z-scores. These standardized scores were used to compute a "social preference" score (ZTPN - ZTNN) and a "social impact" score (ZTPN + ZTNN). As implied by the formulas constituting these indices, social preference reflects the extent to which a person's popularity exceeds his or her rejection while social impact reflects the person's overall level of visibility among housemates. Extensive evidence documents the validity and reliability of the peer nomination technique (for reviews, see Burleson, 1986; Ladd & Asher, 1985).

Positive nominations were also used to identify friendship pairs. That is, if an individual named by the subject as "most liked" reciprocated this nomination, the two were considered a friendship pair. Subjects could obtain up to three friendship pairs. Variations of this procedure have been employed by Berndt (1981a, 1981b, 1982) and McGuire and Weisz (1982), who report it is a valid and reliable way of identifying mutual or reciprocated liking.

Peer ratings. In addition to the oral nomination task, subjects also completed a written peer rating task. Participants were presented with a list of individuals living in their respective houses and asked to rate how well they liked each member on a one-to-seven Likert scale. Response alternatives ranged from "really dislike" ("1") to

"really like" (7"). Because the rating scale contained the names of all active members, it served to remind subjects of persons within the organization they might otherwise have forgotten. Thus, ratings were typically elicited before nominations as a way of ensuring participants considered all members of their house before nominating liked and disliked others. In the current study, the mean rating a participant received from fellow group members was used as an index of his/her overall "likability." Hymel (1983) and Ladd and Asher (1985) summarize evidence supporting the reliability and validity of peer ratings of liking.

Results

The hypotheses of the study were assessed by correlating subjects' ratings for each of the 8 communication skills with the 8 indices of interpersonal acceptance. That is, subjects' judgments about the importance of different communication skills in friends were used to predict how well they were accepted by housemates. To test hypotheses involving predicted gender differences, correlations were calculated separately for males and females; these coefficients were then compared by means of *z*-tests.

Table 3 displays the correlations between ratings of the importance of different communication skills in friends and the indices of peer acceptance. In general, the correlations are low in magnitude. However, several

statistically significant associations of theoretical interest were observed.

As predicted, valuing friends' affectively oriented communication skills was significantly associated with several indices of interpersonal acceptance. Ratings of the importance of comforting skill and ego-support skill were positively associated with the number of "peer counselor" nominations an individual received (rs = .12 and .13, respectively, ps < .05), positively associated with the social preference index (rs = .14 and .16, respectively, ps < .05), and negatively associated with the number of negative or "most disliked" nominations received (rs = -.12 and -.13, respectively, ps < .05). Consistent with these findings, the index reflecting overall evaluation of affectively oriented communication skills was positively associated with peer counselor nominations (r = .12, p < .05) and inversely associated with disliked nominations (r = -.13, p < .05).[3]

Number of nominations received for the "most fun to party with" role was predicted by several communication skill evaluations, including those for persuasive skill (r = .16, p < .05), narrative skill (r = .13, p < .05), conversational skill (r = .12, p < .05), and the index for non-affectively oriented skills (r = .17, p < .01). Judgments about the importance of friends' conversational skills were also positively associated with peer counselor nominations (r = .13, p < .05) and the index of social

impact (r = .15, p < .05). Finally, evaluation of persuasive skill was positively associated with mean liking ratings (r = .16, p < .05).

MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

Insert Table 3 About Here

MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM

As anticipated, the relationship between communication skill evaluations and interpersonal acceptance was mediated in several cases by gender. Specifically, we predicted that females' acceptance by peers would depend, to a greater extent than males' acceptance, on endorsement of affectively oriented communication skills. Conversely, we expected that males' acceptance by peers would depend, to a greater extent than females' acceptance, on endorsement of non-affectively oriented skills. (Because of the exploratory nature of the current study and the generally small magnitudes of the zero-order associations, alpha for the tests of differences between independent correlations was set at p = .10.)

Consistent with predictions, evaluations of affectively oriented communication skills were more strongly related to indices of acceptance in females than males (see table 4). For example, ratings of the importance of comforting skill better predicted the number of negative nominations received by females than males (rs = -.25 and -.02, respectively, z = 1.61, p < .06), and better predicted mean liking ratings (rs .19 and -.03 for females and males, respectively, z = 1.53, p < .08). Evaluations of ego support did a better job of

predicting the number of peer counselor nominations received by women than men (r_s = .25 and .06, respectively, z = 1.36, p < .09). Judgments about the importance of friends' conflict management skills were more strongly related to peer counselor nominations among women than men (r_s = .23 and .00, respectively, z = 1.59, p < .07), and more strongly related to mean liking ratings for women than men (r_s = .12 and -.08, respectively, z = 1.41, p < .08). And the overall index for affectively oriented communication skills better predicted peer counselor nominations received by women than men (r_s = .24 and .06 respectively, z = 1.29, p < .10).

##########

Insert Table 4 About Here

##########

Also as expected, evaluations of non-affectively oriented communication skills generally did a better job of predicting males' acceptance by peers than females' acceptance by peers. For example, ratings of the importance of friends' persuasive skills were more strongly related to the social preference scores of males than females (r_s = .17 and -.03, respectively, z = 1.39, p < .09). Males' evaluations of regulative skills better predicted the number of positive or "most liked" nominations they received (r_s = .13 and -.05 for males and females, respectively, z = 1.29, p < .10), as well as males' social preference scores (r_s = .18 and -.04 for males and females, respectively, z = 1.53, p < .08). The index reflecting overall evaluation of non-

affectively oriented skills also better predicted the social preference scores of males than of females (r_s = .15 and -.05, respectively, z = 1.42, p < ..09).

Evaluations of conversational skills behaved somewhat strangely: Males who rated friends' conversational skills as high in importance received a relatively large number of "most disliked" nominations (r = .17). This association was significantly greater than the weak negative association between these variables observed for females (r = -.08, z = 1.68, p < .05). Males' evaluations of conversational skills also did a better job of predicting their overall social impact on peers than did females' evaluations of this skill (r_s = .25 and .06, respectively, z = 1.34, p < .09).

Discussion

The results of this study reflect the truism that the things we value in others often tell more about us than they do about others. The types of communication skills we value in our friends express how we conceive of the friendship relation, what we look to friends for, and what we expect from our friends. We communicate these values, conceptions, and expectations to those with whom we interact in numerous subtle and not-so-subtle ways. In turn, others make judgments about our desirability as relational partners based, in part, on their perceptions of the things we value in them. Thus, it makes sense to find, as we did in the current study, that the value we place on friends'

communication skills is a significant predictor of how accepted we are by peers.

More specifically, we predicted that persons placing a premium on their friends' affectively oriented communication skills would enjoy higher levels of peer acceptance than persons holding these communication skills in less esteem. Viewing these communication skills as important is consistent with conceiving the friendship relation as built around the creation of psychological intimacy, the exploration and validation of selves, and the provision of mutual emotional support. Developmental research indicates that most young adults conceive of friendship in this manner (e.g., Tesch, 1983; Tesch & Martin, 1983). Moreover, prior research had found that affectively oriented communication skills such as comforting and ego support were rated by samples of college students as the most important skills for friends to possess (Burleson & Samter, in press). Consistent with theoretical expectations, then, the present study found that valuing friends' affectively oriented skills was significantly associated with several indices of peer acceptance.

Although the magnitudes of the correlations were rather low, the pattern of significant associations provides confirmation for our hypotheses. Persons rating their friends' comforting and ego-support skills as high in importance were more preferred social companions, received more "peer counselor" nominations, and received fewer

"disliked" nominations. The same pattern was observed for the overall index of affectively oriented communication skills: High importance ratings for this index were positively associated with peer counselor nominations and the social preference index and negatively association with "disliked" nominations. This pattern of relationships clearly suggests that college students view friendship as a relation centered on mutual psychological support, shared intimacies, and emotional involvement. College students who conceive of friendship in this age-typical manner are more accepted by the peers with whom they happen to reside.

Recent research on the development of friendships among college students emphasizes the significant role played by mutual entertainment, play, and having fun (see Hays, 1989). Valuing non-affectively oriented communication skills such as persuasion, narrative ability, and general conversational skills was significantly associated with being perceived as a fun person with whom to party. These relationships make a good deal of sense. People who value others' abilities to influence people, tell jokes and stories, and converse easily are likely to view interpersonal relationships as source of entertainment and fun. Such individuals thus would likely be enjoyable companions with whom to attend social events and "play."

Relationships between skills evaluations and interpersonal acceptance were found to vary in a predicted manner as a function of gender. Associations between

valuing friends' affectively oriented skills and indices of peer acceptance were significantly strong for females than males. Indeed, the correlations between males' evaluations of communication skills such as comforting, ego support, and conflict management and measures of peer acceptance approached zero whereas the correlations between females' evaluations of these skills and indices of acceptance were among the strongest associations observed in the study. In contrast, males enjoying high levels of peer acceptance viewed friends' non-affectively oriented skills as particularly important. While the correlations between females' ratings of skills such as persuasion, conversation, and regulation and indices of acceptance were near zero, males' evaluations of these skills were the best predictors of their levels of interpersonal acceptance.

These gender differences are consistent with the findings of previous research documenting gender-related differences in friendship conceptions and behaviors (see Winstead, 1986). Females are more inclined than males to view friendship as a context for the discussion of feelings, intimacies, and relationships. Hence, it makes sense to find that females valuing skills useful in the discussion of affectively oriented topics are more accepted by same-sex peers. In contrast, males take a more activity-centered view toward friendships. Thus, it seems reasonable that males who value skills that facilitate the achievement of instrumental goals (e.g., persuasion) and entertain others

(e.g., narrative skills) would be more accepted by their same-sex peers. In sum, it appears that members of each gender who value forms of communication consistent with how their respective genders practice friendship are more accepted by same-sex peers.

Overall, the results of this study underscore the importance of sharing age- and gender-typical conceptions of friendship. Persons maintaining age- and gender-typical conceptions of the friendship relation -- expressed in their ratings of different communication skills -- are more accepted and/or less rejected by their peers. The results of this study also support the idea that individuals' evaluations of different communication skills can serve as a vehicle for accessing more general conceptions of social relationships. Future work should address the extent to which people's ideas about the importance of different communication skills in various relationships relate to how they think about and act in those relationships.

Notes

1. These gender differences, though important, should be viewed in the context of larger similarities in the skill evaluations of males and females. That is, although males viewed narrative and persuasive skills as more important than females, males still viewed ego-support and comforting skills and more important for friends to possess than narrative or persuasive skills. In the language of analysis of variance, the within-subject effect for type of communication skill was much stronger than the between-groups effect of gender. Thus, with respect to the skill evaluations of males and females, the similarities are stronger than the differences.
2. Both nominations and ratings were employed because evidence suggests that each sociometric technique differs in the kind of information it provides about a person's social status. Whereas positive and negative nominations appear to indicate how many peers regard the target as a close friend or a disliked other, rating-scale measures provide an index of a person's overall "likability" within a group.
3. A series of multiple regression analyses were also conducted using evaluations of the eight communication skills as predictors and each social acceptance as a dependent variable. In each analysis, no more than one skill evaluation significantly predicted the acceptance

indices. The failure to observe significant multiple correlations was due, no doubt, to the generally small magnitudes of the zero-order correlations.

References

Aries, E.J. & Johnson, F.L. (1983). Close friendship in adulthood: Conversational content between same-sex friends. Sex Roles, 9, 1183-1196.

Berndt, T.J. (1981a). Relations between social cognition, nonsocial cognition, and social behavior: The case of friendship. In J.H. Flavell, & L.D. Ross (Eds.), Social cognitive development: Frontiers and possible futures. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Berndt, T.J. (1981b). The effects of friendship on prosocial intentions and behavior. Child Development, 52, 636-643.

Berndt, T.J. (1982). The features and effects of friendship in early adolescence. Child Development, 53, 1447-1460.

Berndt, T.J. (1986). Children's comments about their friendships. In M. Perlmutter (Ed.), Cognitive perspectives on children's social and behavioral development: The Minnesota Symposia on Child Psychology (Vol. 18, pp. 189-212). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Burleson, B.R. (1986). Communication skills and childhood peer relationships: An overview. In M.L. McLaughlin (Ed.), Communication yearbook (Vol. 9, pp. 143-180). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Burleson, B.R., & Samter, W. (in press). Effects of cognitive complexity on the perceived importance of communication skills in friends. Communication Research.

Burleson, B.R., Werking, K.J., Samter, W., & Holloway, R. (1988, November). Person-centered communication and friendship in young adults: Which skills matter most? Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association convention, New Orleans.

Coie, J. D., Dodge, K. A., & Coppotelli, H. (1982). Dimensions and types of social status: A cross-age perspective. Developmental Psychology, 18, 557-570.

Damon, W. (1977). The social world of the child. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hays, R.B. (1989) Day-to-day friendships. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 6, 21-38.

Hymel, S. (1983). Preschool children's peer relations: Issues in sociometric assessment. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 29, 237-260.

Ladd, G.W., & Asher, S.R. (1985). Social skill training and children's peer relations. In L. L'Abate & M. Milan (Eds.), Handbook of social skills training (pp. 219-244). New York: Wiley.

McGuire, K.D., & Weisz, J.R. (1982). Social cognition and behavior correlates of pre-adolescent chumship. Child Development, 53, 1478-1484.

Samter, W. (1989). Communication skills predictive of interpersonal acceptance among college students in a group living situations: A sociometric study. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of Communication, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN.

Selman, R.L. (1981). The child as a friendship philosopher. In S.R. Asher & J.M. Gottman (Eds.), The development of children's friendships (pp. 242-272). New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Serafica, F.C. (1982). Conceptions of friendship and interaction between friends: An organismic-developmental perspective. In F.C. Serafica (Ed.), Social-cognitive development in context (pp. 100-132). New York: Guilford.

Smollar, J., & Youniss, J. (1982). Social development through friendship. In K. H. Rubin & H. S. Ross (Eds.), Peer relationships and social skills in childhood (pp. 279-298). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Tabachnick, B.G., & Fidell, L.S. (1983). Using multivariate statistics. New York: Harper & Row.

Tesch, S.A. (1983). Review of friendship development across the lifespan. Human Development, 26, 266-276.

Tesch, S.A., & Martin, R.R. (1983). Friendship concepts of young adults in two age groups. Journal of Psychology, 115, 7-12.

Werking, K.J., Samter, W., & Burleson, B.R. (1989). Gender differences in the perceived importance of communication skills in same-sex friends: Two studies. Unpublished manuscript, Department of Communication, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN.

Winstead, B.A. (1986). Sex differences in same-sex friendships. In V.J. Derlega & B.A. Winstead (Eds.), Friendship and social interaction (pp. 81-100). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Table 1

Retained Items and Alpha Coefficients for

Communicative Functions Questionnaire

---

1. Comforting (5 items, standardized alpha = .76)
   a. Can really help me work through my emotions when I'm feeling upset or depressed about something.
   b. Helps me understand why some things hurt or depress me so much.
   c. Can really cheer me up when I'm feeling down or upset.
   d. Almost always makes me feel better when I'm hurt or depressed about something.
   e. Makes me see that it's sometimes okay to get down or hurt or depressed about things.
2. Ego Support (5 items, standardized alpha = .84)
   a. Makes me feel like I'm a good person.
   b. Makes me strive to be the very best person I can be.
   c. Makes me believe in myself.
   d. Makes me feel like I can achieve my personal goals.
   e. Makes me feel like my ideas about things are interesting and worthwhile.
3. Conflict Management (4 items, standardized alpha = .70)
   a. Makes me believe it's possible to resolve our conflicts in a way that won't hurt or embarrass each other.

Table 1, continued

b. Makes me feel like I can be really honest about the things in our relationship that produce conflict.

c. Makes me see that even the best of relationships have their conflicts or disagreements that need to be worked through.

d. Makes me realize that it's better to deal with conflicts we have than to keep things bottled up inside.

4. Regulative Skill (4 items, standardized alpha = .80)

a. Makes me see how my mistakes hurt myself as well as other people.

b. Makes me feel like I can learn something from my mistakes by taking the time to listen and work through things with me.

c. Makes me want to correct mistakes I make, to make good on the rules I break.

d. Makes me feel like I have the ability to fix my own mistakes.

5. Persuasive Skill (4 items, standardized alpha = .80)

a. The ability to convince people to do things they wouldn't normally do.

b. Makes you think you're doing something because you want to do it, rather than because he/she has persuaded you to do it.

c. Coming up with really good reasons for getting people to do what he/she wants.

Table 1, continued

d. Can get people to do just about anything.

6. Narrative Skill (3 items, standardized alpha = .76)

a. Can make life seem a little less serious by telling me a joke or a story in his/her own intriguing way.

b. The ability to tell a story in a way that makes me hang on every word.

c. Always telling an entertaining joke or an interesting story.

7. Referential Skill (3 items, standardized alpha = .80)

a. Explains things very well.

b. Makes you understand exactly what he/she is referring to.

c. Explains things like directions or instructions so that they're really easy to follow.

8. Conversational Skill (5 items, standardized alpha = .73)

a. Can make conversation seem effortless.

b. Makes conversations seem really easy and fun.

c. Can "shoot the breeze" for hours on end.

d. Making me feel like I can be myself when we talk to one another.

e. Starting up a conversation with almost anyone in any kind of situation.

Table 2

Loadings for the Second-Order Factor Analysis on the Communicative Functions Questionnaire

TYPE OF SKILL	FACTOR LOADINGS	
	Factor I: Affectively-Oriented Communication Skills	Factor II: Non-affectively Oriented Communication Skills
Comforting Skill	.82*	-.11
Conflict Management	.77*	.01
Ego Support Skill	.72*	-.02
Regulative Skill	.63*	.31
Persuasive Skill	-.13	.76*
Narrative Skill	.05	.60*
Conversational Skill	.32	.44
Referential Skill	.29	.32

Note: N = 204. An asterisk (*) indicates items retained for use in subsequent analyses.

Table 3

Correlations between Communication Skill Evaluations and

Peer Acceptance Indices

	PEER ACCEPTANCE INDEX							
COMM SKILL	POSNOMS	NEGNOMS	COUNNOM	PARTNOM	LIKERAT	FRNDPRS	SOCPREF	SOCIMPAC
COMFORT	.0852	-.1227*	.1173*	.10e9+	.0078	.0812	.1381*	.016e
ESD SUPPORT	.0e17	-.1334*	.1308*	.0917+	.052v	.0317	.1e20*	-.0447
CONFLICT MNG	.0237	-.0915	.08e9	.0e45	-.0088	.0450	.0582	-.0108
REGULATIVE	.04e7	-.0702	.0800	.0765	.0594	.0213	.0521	-.0108
PERSUASION	.0708	-.0578	.0481	.1594*	.1e30*	.023e	.0e52	-.02e9
NARRATIVE	.0575	.0135	.1047+	.12e9*	-.0041	.101e+	.0022	.0280
REFERENTIAL	-.0054	-.0385	.0910	-.0109	-.0795	-.0530	.009e	-.0262
CONVERSATION	.0914+	.050e	.1349*	.11e9*	-.0137	.0154	.0148	.1489*
AFFECT COMM	.0e58	-.1258*	.1249*	.1030+	.0274	.0517	.1231*	-.0163
NON-AFFECT	.07e8	-.0178	.0899	.1714**	.0981+	.0725	.0415	-.0003

Note: +p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01. Ns range from 197 to 200.

POSNOMS = positive nominations, NEGNOMS = negative nominations, COUNNOM = peer counselor nominations, PARTNOM = run to party with nominations, LIKERAT = mean liking rating, FRNDPRS = mutual friendships pairs, SOCPREF = social preference score, SOCIMPAC = social impact score.

Table 4

Differences in Correlations between Communication Skill Evaluations and Peer Acceptance Indices as a Function of Gender

	PEER ACCEPTANCE INDEX							
	POSNOMS		NEGNOMS		COUNNOM		PARTNOM	
COMM Skill	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
COMFORT	.1148	.1074	-.0154[a]	-.2457**[b]	.0823	.2185*	.0618	.1743*
EGO SUPPORT	.1156	.0368	-.1064	-.1580+	.0607[a]	.2518**[b]	.1176	.0708
CONFLICT MNG	.0352	.0493	-.0614	-.1192	.0017[a]	.2163*[b]	.0407	.0960
REGULATIVE	.1213+[a]	-.0527[b]	-.0806	-.0844	.0524	.1045	.1214	.0313
PERSUASION	.1099	-.0271	-.1253	-.0057	.0128	.0506	.1747*	.1546+
NARRATIVE	.0847	-.0061	-.0331	.0475	.1015	.0845	.1854*	.0746
REFERENTIAL	-.0696	-.0787	-.0301	-.0443	.1199	.0665	.0754	-.1041
CONVERSATION	.1590+	.0096	.1692+[a]	-.0750[b]	.1511+	.1099	.1081	.1268*
AFFECT COMP	.1169	.0330	-.0806	-.1726*	.0585[a]	.2390**[b]	.1039	.1066
NON-AFFECT	.1172	-.0202	-.0990	.0260	.0652	.0829	.2152*	.1398+

Note: +p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01. For males, Ns range from 94 to 98. For females, Ns range from 97 to 102.

For each pair of correlations, entries with different superscripts significantly (p < .10) differ by the t-test for independent correlations.

POSNOMS = positive nominations, NEGNOMS = negative nominations, COUNNOM = peer counselor nominations, PARTNOM = fun to party with nominations, LIKERAT = mean liking rating, FRNDPRS = mutual friendship pairs, SOCPREF = social preference score, SOCIMPAC = social impact score.

Table 4 (continued)

	PEER ACCEPTANCE INDEX							
	LIKERAT		FRNDPRS		SOCPREF		SOCIMPAC	
COMM SKILL	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
COMFORT	-.0318[a]	.1858[b]	.0496	.1076	.1134	.1823[a]	.0885	-.0847
EGO SUPPORT	.1112	.0945	.0772	.0168	.1840[a]	.1549+	.0338	-.1370+
CONFLICT MNG	-.0788[a]	.1220[b]	.0018	.0856	.0698	.0573	-.0217	-.0090
REGULATIVE	.0269	.0488	.0285	.0190	.1775[a]	-.0445[b]	.0586	-.0778
PERSUASION	.1510+	.0293	.0074	.0659	.1719[a]	-.0298[b]	-.0097	-.0304
NARRATIVE	-.0094	-.1175	.1275	.1022	.0751	-.0586	.0200	.0510
REFERENTIAL	-.1085	.0389	-.0267	-.0852	.0711	-.0384	.0248	-.0867
CONVERSATION	-.0507	-.0295	.0321	.0039	.0117	.0146	.2476[a]	-.0565[b]
AFFECT COMM	.0114	.1212+	.0346	.0624	.1657+	.0959	.0484	-.0989
NON-AFFECT	.0916	-.0551	.0728	.1026	.1527+[a]	-.0544[b]	.0052	.0133

Note: +p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01. For males, Ns range from 94 to 96. For females, Ns range from 97 to 102.

For each pair of correlations, entries with different superscripts significantly (p < .10) differ by the t-test for independent correlations.

POSNOMS = positive nominations, NEGNOMS = negative nominations, COUNNOM = peer counselor nominations, PARTNOM = fun to party with nominations, LIKERAT = mean liking rating, FRNDPRS = mutual friendships pairs, SOCPREF = social preference score, SOCIMPAC = social impact score.